



TEN WAYS TO

# reduce your drug costs

## 1 TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT COST

Nearly half of the people in our January 2009 drug survey said that their doctors don't consider cost when prescribing medications. And earlier Consumer Reports surveys of doctors found that physicians ranked price as their least important consideration when prescribing drugs. (How well the drug worked was their first concern.) In fact, the doctors said they often don't know how much the drugs they prescribe cost. So you need to be assertive and tell your doctor that cost, as well as effectiveness, matters.

## 2 ASK YOUR DOCTOR IF YOU CAN SAFELY SPLIT YOUR PILLS

You may be able to save money if your doctor can prescribe a pill that's twice your normal dose, so you could split it in half. To make the practice safe, only divide pills that are scored, use a pill-splitting device, and never split extended- or continued-release tablets. Divide one pill at a time and take the halves as consecutive doses so that you don't get too much or too little. But don't split pills without the permission of your doctor or pharmacist.

## 3 ASK FOR GENERICS

Generics are much cheaper—and just as safe and effective—as their brand-name counterparts. For example, to treat allergies, you could take the brand-name drug Claritin for up to \$37 a month, or its generic version, loratadine, for less than \$12. Both drugs are available without a prescription.

If a generic isn't available, ask if your doctor can substitute a different, cheaper drug that works just as well. For example, instead of treating osteoarthritis with Celecoxib (Celebrex) for nearly \$300 a month, you may be able to get by with Ibuprofen (Advil and generic) instead. The generic form of that drug costs just \$21 a month and can be purchased without a prescription.

## 4 ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY DRUGS

Save money and lower your risk of side effects and drug interactions by eliminating unnecessary drugs. Review all of your medications with your doctor or pharmacist at least every six months, eliminating duplicate or unnecessary drugs or adjusting dosages that are higher than necessary.

## 5 SHOP AROUND

Many grocery stores and big-box stores, such as Costco and Walmart, now offer hundreds of generics for \$4 or less—though independent pharmacy owners tell us that most mom-and-pop pharmacies will match those prices if you ask.

Be wary, however, of international Internet drug sites that are unregulated and may sell counterfeit or contaminated drugs. Stick with pharmacies that carry the VIPPS (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Site) seal, which is awarded by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy.

## 6 AVOID FREE SAMPLES

Free samples can cost you more in the long run, because if you stick with that medication, which is usually a brand name and expensive, your doctor will eventually have to write a prescription for it. Plus, it may not be the best choice for your treatment.

## 7 BE WARY OF TV DRUG ADS

These ads usually pitch the newest drugs, which are not only more expensive but also often work no better than older ones. And all too often, drug ads omit safety or side-effect information.

## 8 GET THE RIGHT INSURANCE

The right drug plan can save you big bucks.

## 9 GET HELP

Pharmaceutical companies offer a certain amount of free or low-cost medication through their patient assistance program. Use the online directory at [RxAssist.org](http://RxAssist.org) to see if there's one that can help you.

## 10 CHECK OUT OUR BEST BUY DRUG REPORTS

We rate 28 of the most common drug classes, including those used to treat allergies, depression, heart attack, heart failure, heartburn, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. The reports combine background materials about the disease, an expert review of the scientific evidence, and pricing information.

